

VZCZCXRO2601

RR RUEHAG RUEHAST RUEHDA RUEHDF RUEHFL RUEHIK RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHLN  
RUEHLZ RUEHPOD RUEHROV RUEHSR RUEHVK RUEHYG  
DE RUEHSQ #0577/01 2590523  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 150523Z SEP 08  
FM AMEMBASSY SKOPJE  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 7677  
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE 0409  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC  
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC  
RUESEN/SKOPJE BETA  
RUEHSQ/USDAO SKOPJE MK  
RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 SKOPJE 000577

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/SCE AND INR/B

E.O. 12958: NA

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [MK](#) [AL](#) [KV](#)

SUBJECT: DPA CRACKS UP

Sensitive but unclassified - please protect accordingly.

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Ethnic Albanian DPA Vice Presidents Imer Selmani and Ruzhdi Matoshi have left the party to form a new one based on "ideas and values," breaking from what they call the thuggish politics of DPA leader Menduh Thaci. Selmani and Matoshi have so far pulled with them a total of three DPA MPs some other prominent party members, and claim 70% of the party apparatus has also followed. They assert that Thaci has initiated a "witch hunt," including personal threats of violence. Thaci denies it all: he says Selmani is a tool of the Gruevski government, the new party lacks a political base and any separate political philosophy, and he and his people have made no threats. For now, our priority is to ensure this divorce is a peaceful one. End summary.

A New Democracy?

¶2. (SBU) After months of furtive internal dissent within the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA), party Vice Presidents Imer Selmani and Ruzhdi Matoshi have broken off from the party to form their own, along with at least a handful of other DPA activists, including former Minister of Education Rushiti and MP Abedin Zumberi. Selmani, himself a Minister of Health from 2006-2008, has emerged as the leader and has courted international support, including our own. He told us that he wants to leave DPA's reputation of thuggery and criminality behind and to pursue policies based on "ideas and values," though he has not been clear on how these policies will differ from DPA's own: a demand for a stronger law on languages, recognition of Kosovo, dropping the ICTY cases returned from The Hague, compensation for all victims (i.e., including e-Albanians) from the 2001 violence, etc.

¶3. (SBU) Selmani rejected any hint that his new party - as yet unnamed, though he is considering "New Democracy" or "New Albanian Democracy" -- will mend fences with the largest e-Albanian party, the Democratic Union for Integration, though he said he did hope to pull one or two dissatisfied DUI MPs into his party. (This could be critical for Selmani, in that a party needs five MPs to constitute a parliamentary group, which provides far greater access to debate and other parliamentary privileges. So far he only has three guaranteed MPs.) Though cooperation with DUI is out of the question, Selmani said he wanted a civilized debate with his rivals, not a relationship based solely on personal hostility. He told us Sept. 11 that, unlike Thaci, he would meet DUI leader Ali Ahmeti; however, Selmani also stated that he will not carry on a dialogue with "criminal elements" within DUI.

¶4. (SBU) In Selmani's telling, dissatisfaction with DPA leader Menduh Thaci came to a head at an angry Aug 28 party meeting, at which Thaci allegedly quashed discussion of an internal party survey

which blamed the party leadership and Thaci in particular for recent DPA failures, including yet another loss to DUI in June 2008 parliamentary elections in which, to compound matters, DPA stood accused as the primary culprit for carrying out voter intimidation, ballot stuffing, and other fraud. Selmani said only he, Matoshi, Sulejman Rushiti, and Besim Dogani rose to decry Thaci and demand changes. Thereafter all the speakers save Dogani decided it was time to make a clean break.

#### Claims of Intimidation

-----

15. (SBU) Selmani accused Thaci of instigating a "witch hunt" to intimidate those who did or might join the breakaway. According to Selmani, the notorious Krasniqi brothers (as in Agim Krasniqi, now in jail awaiting serious charges election violence on behalf of DPA last June) called the mayor of Saraj, Bekim Fazliu, and threatened to break his bones. However, Selmani reported, the brothers contacted him later to call off the threat and denounce Thaci. Selmani also accused Thaci of recruiting Islamic Community of Macedonia President Rexhepi to condemn Selmani from the pulpit (he reportedly refused). Fazliu subsequently wrote the Embassy on Sept 10 to claim that these attempts at intimidation were ongoing, and the following day Selmani repeated these assertions to us. According to Selmani, this harassment includes late-night threatening phone calls, repeated pass-bys of their houses by thugs in cars, etc, but no actual violence yet.

16. (SBU) Matoshi told us Sept 4 that 70% of the DPA party apparatus had already broken away from Thaci. The papers have carried claims by DPA defectors that DPA offices in at least five cities have switched allegiances, with one story claiming 80% of the DPA

SKOPJE 00000577 002 OF 002

faithful have departed. This seems like an exaggeration, but is difficult to verify at this time.

#### Thaci: No Threats, No Substance

-----

17. (SBU) For his part, Thaci at first disappeared, traveling to Albania and Kosovo in an apparent effort to court support from leaders there. He returned to Macedonia earlier this week, telling the press that the defections are no threat to the party, and accused Selmani of forming a conspiracy with PM Gruevski, who he predicted would offer the new party a place in the ruling coalition. Other contacts have echoed this view: Igor Ilievski, a Vice President of the largest e-Macedonian opposition party, SDSM, told us Sept. 10 that Gruevski and Selmani are personally close and that he was certain Gruevski would offer the new party a ministry. Ilievski suggested that Selmani and his followers are opportunists, seeking to get back into the government jobs they occupied while DPA was in the ruling coalition from 2006-2008. To us, Selmani rejected any suggestion that he planned to join the VMRO-led government. He claimed this would lose him supporters.

18. (SBU) On Sept. 11, a relaxed and cheerfully defiant Thaci repeated his press line to us: the defections are a Gruevski plot, and Selmani will be offered a place in the government. He mocked Selmani and his followers for having no solid political base and no political philosophy apart from his, thus they "don't dare remain in opposition." DPA activists defecting to Selmani were people Thaci planned to fire anyway for poor performance. Thaci flatly denied that he or anyone close to him was threatening the defectors, and said he would fire anyone who was doing so. (We pressed him hard on this.) He pledged that those filling senior party posts vacated by Selmani and Matoshi will be replaced in a "bottom up" democratic fashion.

19. (SBU) Comment: We told Selmani that we are not taking sides as his new party takes shape, but that any new party based on values and ideas -- and which rejects violence -- is a welcome development. Selmani is young and ambitious, and he and Rushiti represented -- at least publicly -- the part of DPA more interested in this approach. It is far too early to tell whether this is the end of DPA and the beginning of a new era in e-Albanian politics in

Macedonia. This may be a welcome development, but for now, our priority is to send a clear message to both sides that this divorce must be a peaceful one. End comment.

NAVRATIL